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THE ENGLISH ATTACK ON CARTAGENA IN 1741; AND PLANS FOR AN ATTACK ON PANAMA

The documents appearing below are from the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, and are among the transcripts made for the Library from the originals in the British Museum. The pressmark of the originals is "Additional MSS., 22680", and the volume containing them is lettered "Miscellaneous Papers relating to America &c."

The first document refers to the wellknown attack on Cartagena in the Spanish Indies made by the joint expedition under Admiral Edward Vernon in command of the sea forces and Brigadier General Wentworth in command of the land forces. The account although purporting to be by a Spanish official has some slight appearance of really having been written by an Englishman. The date should be 1741 instead of 1740, and "NS" is of course for "New Style". The account, in the main, while incomplete, is a fairly faithful narration of the events of the attack, the fruits of which were largely lost by the incompetence of Wentworth. Admiral Vernon, the most efficient British naval officer of his time, had been in the West Indies as early as 1707, and ever since that time had been an ardent advocate of "singeing the Spaniard's beard". As early as July, 1739, Vernon, in anticipation of war with Spain, had been ordered "to destroy the Spanish settlements in the West Indies and to distress their shipping by every method whatever". War was actually declared October 19, 1739, and on November 20, Vernon captured Porto Bello. March 6, 1740, Cartagena was bombarded, although to little purpose, and March 24, Chagre was captured. In January, 1741, Vernon was joined by twenty-five ships of the line and a land force of 9,000 under Wentworth. The divided authority augured ill from the start, and the expedition had little effect. On the 3d of March, the fleet appeared off Cartagena, but the fort of San Luis which guarded the harbor on the north

side of Boca Chica was not taken until the 23d because of Wentworth's hesitation and slowness. Finally, the latter, by his attack on San Lazaro, which was made with little or no preparation, although the Spaniards had been given time to entrench themselves, lost over 3,000 of his men in killed and wounded.

The other documents, which relate to the same matter, although undated, bear internal evidence of being later than the capture of Porto Bello by Admiral Vernon, as the latter's operations about that place are mentioned. The plan and method appear to have been discussed in the council of war held on board Vernon's flagship, the *Boyne*, on Saturday morning, October 31, 1741. At that council (the report of which accompanies these several documents) one of the decisions was as follows: "And in regard to Pannama, We unanimously agree from the best advices, We have been Able to Collect, that it is impracticable to advance with Cannon to Pannama, which being a fortified Town, with Above fifty pieces of Cannon mounted on the Ramparts & a Sufficient Garrison, We cannot think it practicable to attempt it without Cannon". The main importance of these two documents is the evidence they furnish of the value placed by the British on the reduction of the Spanish settlements in America.

JAMES ALEXANDER ROBERTSON.

A BRIEF RELATION OF THE EXPEDITION TO CARTAXENA
BEING AN EXTRACT OF A LETTER WROTE BY A
SPANISH OFFICER, (THAT WAS IN THE SAID SIEGE)
TO HIS FRIEND AT THE HAVANA

On the 16th of March 1740 NS. one Hundred, & thirty Sail of Ships, consisting of Men of War, Bomb-Ketches, Fire Ships, Transports, &c. appear'd off Boca Chica.

The English Fleet remain'd before the port of Cartaxena, w.thout doing any thing Else then Cannonade the Castle of Boca Chica, w.ch they Continu'd four days, with all their Ships, but to no Effect, On which they Errected on Shoar a Battery of 18 Gunns, & by that Means dismounted our Artillery & Obliged the Garrison to retire into the City, before the Enemy enter'd the Port, & we also Found it convenient to

abandon all the other Castles, & Fortresses, & to Burn & Sink all the Ships both Kings & other's that the Enemy might not Possess them but through neglect & Hurry, the Galicia Escap'd w.ch the Enemy's made themselves master's of, w.th the Capt. of Her, & the Capt. of the Marines, & Sev.l of ye men on Board, (what Number I can't exactly tell)—we left 14 picquets of 14 men Each to Impede the Enemys passage by Land, on the 15th of April they were attach'd [*sic*] by a party from the Enemy, but the latter were repuls'd with great Loss on their side, the day Following being the 16th of April, the Enemy again Attack'd our picquets with greater Force, w.ch obliged them to retire into the City, from that day til[l] the 20th Follow.g the Enemy were Employ'd in digging a Trench, & possess'd themselves of the Two Roads that Lead to the Town—on this day the 20th of April at about three o'Clock in the Morning, the Enemy attack'd the Castle of St. Lazarus, w.th Sword in Hand, imagining they were Capable of taking it by Scaling the Walls, in w.ch they Labour'd til[l] 7 o'Clock, but not being able Longer to resist the prodigious Fire from the Castle of St. Lazarus & the Half Moon, (i.e. a Fortification of the City made in that Form) they were put precipitately to Flight, in which they were Charg'd by a Sally made from the Town under the Command of His Excellency D.n Blas de Lezo & at the Same Time they were pursu'd by a Second Sally of Grenadiers Commanded by the Vice Roy in Person, In order to dislodge the Enemy from that Scituation, which we entirely Obtain'd, & on this Occation [*sic*] we made 50 prisoners, our Grenadiers Kill'd Four Hundred & Seventy of the Enemys in their Trenches—in short the Enemys have had 1500 Men, Kill'd, Wounded & taken prisoners in the Attack of St. Lazarus; we have now Free Communication, to, & from the City—their Gen.l hav.g demanded their Wounded, Prisoners, & Leave to Bury their dead, the Latter only was Granted by the Vice Roy, the City at present is under no danger, & we are Entirely Free from all Our apprehensions—the Enemy are at present Encamp'd at La punta del Cerro de la popa, & their Ships Lay off Boca Chica, except 18 of the largest are at the Island of Treasure, repairing the Considerable damage they receiv'd from the Artillery of Boca Chica.

After the English had departed from Cartaxena I saw the Coppy of a Journal, containing every minute particular of the Whole Siege, w.ch was more exact, & True, than the above, of w.ch I also took a Coppy, but by Length of time, & Travelling by Sea, and Land I have lost it,—However as I still retain Severall particulars in my memory, not men-

tion'd in the for[e]going Extract, I think it not improper for further Satisfaction to recite them here viz.r—Admiral Vernon Station'd the Galicia against the Town & fir'd sev.l Shot, & threw Some Bombs into the City, but as they were not near enough they did little or no damage, but the Galicia receiv'd considerable Hurt, and run on Shoar, where she was Satt [*sic*] on Fire by the Enemy—D.n Blas de Lezo was on Board the Galicia, til[l] the time of the Burning our Ships &c.a & was thrown on the Deck as he Satt in a Chair w.ch was broke & knock'd down by a Cannon Ball from the Enemy & was thereby Slightly Wounded—the Vice King was also Wounded, & D.n Daniel O'Honey (ie: he is an Irishman he was Capt. of the S.n Phelipe, w.ch was Adm.l Torres's Ship, but on his coming out of Cartax.a bound for Hav.a she Sprang a Leak, & put back again) he was dangerously Wounded, Scarce a part in his Body was Free from Splinters—every one Here have a very great Esteem for the English Adm.l he having behav'd w.th great Clemency & Generosity to all our Men, prisoners on board his Fleet; there has pass'd sev.l very Complaisant Lres. between him & the Vice King who speaks w.th great veneration of him, in sh.t every Body will allow that he, & all under his Command behav'd with great Conduct & Intrepidity, but as to the Land Forces, every one is surprized that the English should Intrust the Command of so Fine an Army, to an unexperienc'd Genl. who was Fitter to Command a parcell of Old Women for to his ignorant, Obstinate & Rash Attack of St. Lazarus, was owing our Happy deliverance, & their dolefull defeat, the English Common Soldiers behav'd with the Courage of Lyons, Some of their Officers were very good, but the Generality of them were young, raw, unexperienc'd Men, & more proper to adorn an Assembly of Beaus & Ladys or the Boxes in the Play House, than to Comm.d such brave Men, and as to their Engineers, we Believe that none of them were ever at a Siege, or had ever Smelt Gunpowder, and were more proper to Form Hay Stacks, than to erect Batterys—to conclude they Confess, that had the English follow'd them closely, after the taking the Castles & made themselves masters of the port, when they were flying to the City Gates, they might then have taken the Town whilst they were in Confusion, nay even after that Ommission 'twas in the power of the English to have made themselves Masters of the Town, For when they had possess'd themselves of the Two Roads that Lead to the City, they should have Errected a Regular Battery against the Castle & Bombarded it in Form, but Gen.l Wentworth had a mind to exceed even the great Duke of Marlborough, by attacking stone Walls

& such a number of Cannon w.th Sword in Hand, tho tis to be observ'd He himself Kept out of Harms way. I convers'd with Several Officer's afterwards, that had been in the Siege, & particularly with one that had been there, & went from Havana to Old Spain, in the same Ship I did; & he & every one Confirm'd all the For[e]going particulars—thus ended this Formidable Expedition, w.ch made allmost the Whole World tremble, in loss of Immense Treasures & Blood of Thousands Sacrificed to the pride, ignorance, & Obstinacy of an unexperienc'd General, w.th Contempt on our Side, & Triumph on theirs.

[*Endorsed.*] Relation of the Siege of Cartagena by a Spanish Officer.

[PLANS FOR A SECRET EXPEDITION TO PANAMA]

1st. That if any thing should be debated in Councill of Proceeding to Panama it might be done w.th the Utmost Secresy because we have so many Vessells that trade from this Place to that Coast that should the Affair in any manner come to be known the Traders Certainly would Acquaint them of it & were the Traders to Go with a Convoy we might have a person on Board the said Convoy that Could be Confided in & by that means might Come to the Knowledge of the Strength they have in Panama how they are fortified in Chagre & in what Place.

2dly. That the Soldiers Cloathing ought to be as Light as Possible for the march & Every one to be well provided w.th Shoes for the first two days march is very rocky & Bad.

3rdly. That some days before the fleet sails for the Coast there ought to be a man of warr w.th two Sloops as Traders to the Bastimento's where they might be Able to Get above 20 Persons that would serve for Guides & that know all the secret Paths for it would not be proper to rely upon one Guide or two in such an Affair Likewise at the same time we should have a small man of war between Porto Bello & Chagre to take all Craft that Goes that way & without doubt might Get several Vessells & Negroes fitt for our use to Carry up our Artillery by the River of Chagre to Cruzes, if this design should Go forward this point must be further look'd to in relation to proper Orders for the said Command.rs that are sent on this Affair it being the principal part of the whole Scheme.

4thly. The months of February & March are the Best time in the whole year to travel this Countrey it being the only dry Season & the rivers Passable in Every Place & when this design Goes forward it is very proper that the Gen.l Officer should be well Acquainted w.th the

distance from Place to Place & what manner of Road it is for Every days march.

5thly. there must be a Certain time Appointed for the sailing of this fleet that the other Ships that were sent to Get Guides & Intelligence might have a proper Rendezvous [*sic*] appointed before they Came in Sight of Porto Bello that the Gen.l officers might Give their Orders in all affairs for this must be done with all Secrecy & Expedition to hinder & Cutt off the Communication between Porto Bello & panama w.ch may be Effectuated in this manner.

6thly. That the day before the fleet went Into Porto Bello there Should be five or 600 men landed at nombre de Dios & marchd by some Good Guides to a place Called *Taxa Buena* w.ch is about Eight miles from Porto Bello where they would stop all Persons that were Coming & Going & would be Join'd by the main Body in Less than forty hours for as soon as the fleet Got into the Harbour they might send their forces in the Boats up the River Casea Hall & there Land them then they have not Six Miles to march before they would Join the other Party, as to the People of Porto Bello I do Believe they would Swear Allegiance to his majesty of Great Brittain for they haue told me that Could they Enjoy their Priveledges & Religion they would readily do it but it would be allways necessary to draw off all the Kings forces & officers, all these things might be weighed & proposed to Great Advantage was there once a Resolution of Proceeding.

The method I haue Proposed of marching the forces by Land & in the open Road I think is much more Convenient than to march them by any Bye Paths by reason the Spaniards have no force to hinder our march by the open Road. I have very well viewed them at Several times & know all the Difficulty's that Can arise therefrom I have heard some Gentlemen say that there is a narrow Pass Called St. Pablo where it is Extremely well fortified & Guarded I was at the Fortifying it therefore know it is a small Fascine Battery & at the best of times Guarded by thirty men & a Lieutenant w.th 4 Swivel Guns mounted on the said Breast work w.ch Carry a pound Shot, but this Road may be Avoided either by the Right or Left or be surprized before they Can have notice of our Arrival, if things are Carried on with Secrecy & Diligence, besides all Fascine work that is done in this Countrey at the years End is tumbled down & rotten by reason of the Heavy rains in the winter this the Experience of twelve years has Shew'd me & before there is a decree issued for money to Rebuild it there Passes a Year or Two & many times the Person employ'd to Carry forward the

work putts the money in his own pockett & makes no Repair, So by this method of marching the Kings Road we Cutt off the Communicat.n of Porto Bello from Panama & in three days Cutt off[f] the Communicat.n from Cruzes & Chagre & of 500 Regular Troops w.ch they have in that Countrey we shall have 400 of them in our Power there being now allways 200 men in Porto Bello & 200 in Chagre River at a Place Called Gottoon w.ch is 9 miles, Above where the Castle was formerly till Admiral Vernon Destroy'd it, This Place is defended by a Fascine Battery & ten Guns w.ch Carry from a 9 to a 6 pound Shott any Vessell w.ch draws not above 14 feet Water may Go into the River of Chagre & proceed up as far as Gottoon where this fortification is but Can Go no Higher up, nor would it be practicable to Carry our Forces up that way by reason of the Dryness of the river & Likewise we Should drive all these forces before us to Panama whereas we shall proceed by Land & be Able to Get between them & panama & very probably find Little or no resistance when we Came there therefore as soon as our Forces had Join'd at *Taxa buena* they should Immediately march on, the first Two days Journey is really fatiguing but the Third would be very Good & Cattle enough to Eat.

7thly. As soon as they Came to a Village of Indians w.ch is Call'd St. Johns they should proceed no farther in the Panama Road but wheel to the Right & Go thro the Savannah to the Town of Cruzes where they would take all the Flat Bottom'd Boats fit for the Carriage of Chagre River to bring our Artillery up when they had taken Cruzes w.ch is a small Town without wall or Great Gun they might directly w.th 700 men Leaving the main Army in Cruzes fall down the river in the said Boats & Come behind the Spaniards Ambushes & hinder the Enemy from Falling the Trees Cross the River to make it unpassable In one day they would fall down the river to this place Called Gottoon where they would meet with our own Vessells w.ch by this time would be there then they would have the Enemy between who would make no Resistance by Reason they would Plainly see their Retreat was Cutt off & they Cannot Get from thence to Panama by Land then they might Immediately put our Artillery in their Boats taking Care not to Put above 2 in a Boat because the Rivers are dry & Should they put in more they would not be able to Get up to Cruzes in three days w.ch is the time that I really believe our whole Army might Join in Cruzes & proceed to Panama so that if Every thing is Carriedo[n] with Secrecy & Expedition our Army might be before panama in thirteen days w.th Artillery & Every thing Convenient Should they Pretend to Stand a

Siege w.ch Cannot be Long by reason of their want of water for they have none But what is very bad in the City.

8thly. From Cruzes to Panama is about 17 English miles Eleven miles of the said distance is a Broad paved Road the other Six miles is Savannah Extreme Even & several Broad Roads to Panama, here the savannah abounds w.th Cattle.

9thly. Four or 500 Musquito men with their Craft would be very Serviceable in this Expedition but they must never know no Otherwise than that they were Going to the westward on some Expedition for to my Certain Knowledge there is some on that Coast who Carry on a Secret Correspondence with ye Spaniards.

10thly. As to the method of Carrying provisions on the Road for the Army it is a thing easily provided for 10 or 12 days afterwards they might Easily be Supply'd by Chagre should there be want, But really I don't think there Can be any & in short if there is any debate in Council on this Affair I Can provide very Good methods for Supplying them.

As to the distances from Place to Place on the Roads the Rivers that are to pass, I have Given your Excell.cy an Acco.t of it formerly & as to the Strength of the City & the Scituation but really as to the People to defend it their whole dependance is on the negroes & Mulattoes for the white men would never Stand to fight.

The negroes and Mulattoes are told Such Stories by the white Spaniards that should they be taken tho they were free that the English would make Slaves of them w.ch really makes them desperate on such Occasions therefore Could your Excell.y secure that there might on our Landing be an Order Given that all Mulattoes or Negroes whatsoever that would Come in & swear Allegiance to his Brittannick Majesty should remain free, the Enemy would have no men to fight & those people would Continually bring Supply's from all parts to us.

[*Endorsed.*] Plans for Secret Expedition to Panama

Methods Proposed to Every Article

1st. That a man of warr should Go down as soon as possible because till She went down & Came up again the Fleet ought not to sail by reason I have Been Eight months from the Said Place & they may have had a fresh recruit from Spain & may be otherwise fortified then when I Came away & as now there are two Traders of this Island Going there it will be proper that a man of Warr should Go down to Convoy them w.ch will take off[f] all suspicion & the Person that was sent to Gett In-

telligence might stay on Board the Traders w.ch is the properest place for them.

2ndly. There ought to be particular Care taken about their Shoes.

3rdly. That when the Person that was sent to Learn news should arrive & the Councill was determined to Proceed about 12 days before the Fleet saild there should a man of Warr & 2 small Vessells as Traders sail Immediately to the Bastimento's to Get the Guides this might be done very easily in this method, the first Person, that went down might make a Bargain w.th the merch.ts that in Such a time he would be down w.th a Convoy & 2 Vessells w.th Provisions & dry Goods, it would take off[f] all manner of Suspicion & in 5 days time they might Get the Guides & Join the fleet off Point Samblas the small man of warr that was to Lay between Porto Bello & Chagre ought to have a Good Pilot & Good Boats & not to Pursue anything without he was sure of taking it & if he hoisted any Colours it ought to be French.

4thly. That if this Goes forward it must be done w.th the utmost Expedition for in the Beginning of April some Rains fall on the sea Coast But in Panama not till Aug.t & as to acquainting the Gen.l Officers of the manner of the Roads I will deliver in a map of that Countrey in the best manner I am Capable of.

5thly. As I mention Landing the first Party at Nombre de Dios I Can Land them in a Place something nigher than it to Porto Bello where they are not above 4 miles from the town of Porto Bello & do the same Execution as if they were landed at nombre de Dios & be nearer to Join the main Body when Landed in the Harbour of Porto Bello but our march must be with all speed to Cruzes to intercept them from Burning the Flat Bottom'd Boats w.ch they Could not soon do because the said Boats are in the middle of the town among their Houses, therefore should they offer to Burn them they must burn the whole town & they Could not have news twenty Hours of us before we should be with them & as the Govern.r of the Town of Cruzes does Live in Panama it would be impossible for the Inhabitants to burn them without his order & before he Could arrive at Cruzes we should be masters of the Place but it would be allways proper for us to have in the Army two Dozen Carpenters & Caulkers that should there be any thing amiss we Could Soon repair it.

7thly. that as soon as the Fleet was at anchor in Porto Bello the small Vessells that were design'd for the River of Chagre should Go there Immediately enter the River & proceed up to Gottoon where the Enemy are fortified.

8thly. While our main Body was in Cruzes the Parties that were sent out might Get Abundance of Oxen & mules that are Continually Employ'd in drawing Timber to Panama & many mules for Carriage for only between panama & this is above 15000 Carriage Beasts.

9thly. There must be particular Care taken that the Mosquito men Join our Small Vessells at Chagre at an Appointed time w.ch they may very Easily do & not be discover'd by the Spaniards taking Care to row all night it being then Calm & in the day to Lay in some port or River there being Enough on that Coast.

10thly. As to the Carrying Provision for the Army in our march to Cruzes we may Carry meat ready Boil'd w.th us for five days & afterward we shall have no need of it & as to the Bread it must be putt in Baggs each Bagg to have 60 pounds in it, and each Soldier may Carry three days provisions in his knapsack & there must be about 300 Tarpaulins about a yard.Square each to Cover the Bread & Ammunition & After the first days march we shall Get mules for Carriage the People that Carries provisions must Every man Carry a Cutting Bill to be ready in the Evening to build Little Hutts w.ch we allways do here & in half an Hour they are done for the Countrey Abounds w.th wood & Palm Trees for that Use.

[*Endorsed.*] Plan for Attack at Porto Bello.